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Congress of the United States
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COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION
IN EUROPE (U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

April 6, 2020

Dr. Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Esper,

We write to express our deep concerns about the abrupt dismissal of Captain Brett E. Crozier, commanding officer – U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt. His removal is shocking to us and is a disservice to his sailors and all servicemembers around the world. This dismissal is unjust and must be rectified.

The dismissal of Captain Crozier sends a chilling message to other commanding officers if they take actions to protect their people. It is frightening to think that this chilling effect might unnecessarily cost the lives of servicemembers.

The President has said that, at essence, we are at war. Actions that are taken at wartime are not always by the book. General Patton wasn't always by the book such as when he slapped soldiers under his command suffering from battle fatigue. However, Eisenhower and Marshall didn't fire Patton and instead had him apologize. Other great leaders took actions to ensure the safety of their servicemembers that, in peacetime would have been questionable, but in wartime are commendable. In wartime, a balance must be struck between what benefit a general or commanding officer has to benefit the war effort and the same balance must be struck with Captain Crozier.

Captain Crozier has the respect of his sailors and took extraordinary actions seeking their safety. While we understand there are concerns about Captain Crozier going outside of his chain of

command, we as a nation often say that the safety of our servicemembers must come first, and Captain Crozier was doing his duty to his sailors. If a punishment is warranted for this extraordinary action (“wartime”) then a simple personal admonishment would suffice. Removal from command sends a chilling message and puts servicemembers in harm’s way.

It is also not clear exactly how the decision to dismiss Captain Crozier was reached. On 1 April, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Michael Gilday said, “We’re not looking to shoot the messenger here.” Indicating that Captain Crozier was not going to be punished for expressing his concerns.¹ However, on 2 April Admiral Gilday and Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly announced that Captain Crozier was being relieved of command.

The world is in the midst of an unprecedented health crisis and we are fighting an invisible enemy. As you are aware, aircraft carriers are closed environments and while there is still much we don’t know about the spread of COVID-19, we can see how it spread in other closed environments such as cruise ships and anticipate the potentially catastrophic spread on the Roosevelt and environments like it. Captain Crozier’s dismissal appears to be an overreaction and inconsistent with other actions the U.S. military has taken. Such as when the commanding officer of the U.S.S. Fitzgerald wasn’t removed for 24 days after a 2017 collision that drowned seven sailors, and the commanding officer of the U.S.S. John McCain wasn’t dismissed for 41 days after a similar collision killed ten sailors.²

This inconsistency is further emphasized with how Captain Crozier was treated especially when you contrast the other commanders previously mentioned along with Edward Gallagher, Clint Lorange, and Mathew Golsteyn, all who have committed war crimes and were granted a pardon by the President. These three men violated the most sacred codes of behavior as well as international and domestic law and yet the President pardoned them despite the fact that many in the military didn’t approve. This inconsistency in treatment is unfathomable.

We are deeply troubled by Captain Crozier’s dismissal and once again urge a reversal of the order and to restore Captain Crozier to the command of the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt. This would help restore the morale of the Roosevelt and servicemembers around the world.

Sincerely,



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

¹ <https://www.defenseone.com/politics/2020/04/it-doesnt-add-me-current-and-former-navy-officials-question-captains-abrupt-dismissal/164363/?oref=d-mostread>

² <https://www.defenseone.com/politics/2020/04/it-doesnt-add-me-current-and-former-navy-officials-question-captains-abrupt-dismissal/164363/?oref=d-mostread>

/s/
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

/s/
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

/s/
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

/s/
Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

/s/
Bill Foster
Member of Congress

/s/
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

/s/
Darren Soto
Member of Congress

/s/
Filemon Vela
Member of Congress